

Work Values and Preferences of the New Workforce: HRM Implications for Macedonian Millennial Generation

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Abstract—A new generation of employees is entering the workforce with new values and preferences toward work. The ways in which these expectations will affect the processes and methods that organizations attract and retain these employees, is an increasingly popular discussion among (HR) managers as they try to understand generational differences among new, younger employees. It is believed that today's young people belong to the Millennial Generation (born 1981-2000), and many studies have confirmed the existence of their most important common characteristics, preferences and expectations toward work and life in general. But the question that arises is: Do all the young people sharing this birth age belong to this generation, no matter of the specifics of the national socio-political and historical background and individual socio-demographics? Therefore, the aim of this research paper is to investigate the work values and preferences of the Macedonian young generation in comparison to the available findings describing the Millennial Generation. For this study a combined approach of quantitative and qualitative research techniques is used. The research results can contribute to the human resource management practice and scientific literature.

Index Terms—Macedonian young generation, millennial generation, work values, work preferences, national context, socio-demographic variables

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Generation Cohort Theory: Millennial Generation

The consideration of generational difference can be traced back to the 1950s, and has its early origins in sociology, most notably in the work of Karl Mannheim (1893–1947), who discussed the ‘problem of generations’ in his seminal paper [1]. For Mannheim, the generation (social) location is an objective fact similar to the class position [2]. Therefore, all individuals, no matter whether they would admit it, belong to a certain generation

location within a particular society. The generation location indicates to definite modes of behavior, feeling and thought [2].

Mannheim’s use of the term generation is in a sense of generation cohort [3]. The “cohort” is defined as people of a particular population who experience the same significant event within a certain time period or as a set of individuals entering a system at the same time, who are presumed to have similarities due to shared experiences that differentiate them [4]. The way in which Mannheim’s theory of generations illuminates the multiple nature of time arises from the mutual phasing of two different calendars [5], the one of personal life span (biological age/life cycle) and the other of history. It is now generally accepted [6] that any differences between cohorts are due to a combination of three different but overlapping processes: age-related - life cycle effects, i.e. young people may be different from older people today, but they may well become more like them tomorrow, once they themselves age; period effects as major events (wars; social movements; economic downturns; medical, scientific or technological breakthroughs) affect all age groups simultaneously, but the degree of impact may differ according to where people are located in the life cycle; cohort effects or trends which often leave a particularly deep impression on young adults because they are still developing their core values; these imprints stay with them as they move through their life cycle.

Mannheim assumes that a persons’ location in the socio-historical structure sets the parameters of their experience and that the significant period in this respect is the exposure to events and experiences in their formative years, i.e. the years of youth [7]. This period of life, the early adolescence until the early twenties, is considered to be of a key significance for the development of the belonging to a generation, because during this phase the identity is formed [8]. Further research in literature also shows that two common elements define the generation: the rate of birth and the

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significant events in life [9]. Thus, a generation is often very broadly defined as ‘an identifiable group that shares birth years, age, location and significant life events at critical developmental stages’ [10]. These events might include traumatic episodes like wars, sizeable shifts in the distribution of resources, heroic figures, or experiences that symbolize an ideology [11] [12] [13].

Events that unfold during the formative rather than later years of individuals are especially consequential. Therefore, individuals born during a particular time, and thus corresponding to the same cohort, will often share specific inclinations and cognitive styles, furthermore, these effects are assumed to persist over time [14]. While each member of a generation is unique in many ways, members of a generation cohort share common formative experiences that affect their outlook on life [15].

When the birth rate increases and remains stable, it signifies a beginning of a new generation. When the birth rate of a newly formed generation is starting to decline, it signifies the end of a generation. Today’s youth, the Millennial generation (born 1981-2000) is roughly 20-year cohort of young people whose “leading edge” members graduated high school in 2000, what gives this generation its name [16]. Twenty years is the approximate period of time between birth and early adulthood, when the ‘next generation’ begins to come along.

The Millennial generation (also known as Generation Y, GenMe, Nexters) members have been exposed during their formative years to a unique variety of historical, cultural, economic and technological changes that have shaped their particular attitudes and values, preferred interaction styles, beliefs, and personal concerns and desires [17]. Some of those key events include the innovation of computers, the Internet, mobile (smart) phones, social media (Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, LinkedIn, YouTube), the ubiquitous presence of television (mostly through cable and satellite TV packages), the deaths of famous persons/icons (Princess Diana, Michael Jackson) city bombings, (civil) wars, terrorist attacks (9/11), Berlin wall fall, cold war end, many corporate and political scandals, natural disasters (hurricanes, tsunami, floods, earthquakes), election of the first African - American President of U.S., world economic recession etc.

B. Millennials’ Work Values and Preferences

Values according to Rokeach [18] (1973) are defined as permanent beliefs and specific ways of preferred behavior. The values have a significant influence over the future actions and decisions made by the individual; they define the belief of people about what is fundamentally right and wrong.

The work values can be defined as opinions of the employees about what can be expected from work and how to act so that such expectations can be achieved. These are generalized expectations for various aspects of work (pay, autonomy, working conditions) as well as results linked with the work (achievement, fulfillment, status) [19].

Work values are often divided to extrinsic (the tangible rewards external to the individual, such as income, advancement opportunities, and status) and intrinsic (the intangible rewards that reflect the inherent interest in the work, the learning potential, and the opportunity to be creative) [20]. Other work values include influence or autonomy in decision making; job stability or security; altruistic rewards such as helping others or contributing to society; social rewards related to interpersonal relationships at work; and leisure [21].

The practitioner literature suggests that generational differences in work values influence the requirements for all aspects of human resource management: recruitment [22]-28], training and development [29]-[33]; career development [34], rewards and working arrangements [35] and management style [36].

Alsop [37] describes the ultimate dream job for the Millennial generation as the one which offers unlimited career opportunities, plenty of praise and rewards, flexible work hours, casual and fun atmosphere, and ‘meteoric rise to the executive suite’. He thinks about this generation in very similar way as Twenge [38] does, both describing the Millennials as very self-confident and with unreasonably high and unrealistic expectations from work and life in general. Twenge believes that ‘follow your dream’ and ‘you can be anything you want to be’ philosophy in the ‘90s has lead this generation to become narcissistic, focused only on the self, and in the same time it is the main reason for Millennials’ disappointments later in life.

But besides their high self-esteem, optimistic attitude and great expectations, the luck simply wasn’t on their side, as at the time when Millennials grew up just enough to begin their careers, the great recession happened, so they confronted massive layoffs and rising unemployment. According De Hauw and De Vos [39] recession is related to lower levels of optimism, or more precisely, during times of recession Millennials lower their expectations regarding the work-life balance and social atmosphere, but their expectations regarding job content, training, career development, and financial rewards remain high. They are less established in their work lives and they struggle to find and keep jobs [40] although they are considered to be the most educated generation in history in terms of finishing college [41]. That’s the reason why Millennials have become less picky about the jobs they’ll accept and they have lowered their expectations for finding the ‘perfect’ job while still hoping for the best [42]. In this manner, it is interesting to point out that Millennials’ biggest fears for the first six months after leaving university are: being not prepared or qualified/competent for the job; not finding a job; and being stuck in a wrong job [43].

Millennials are popularly thought to want it all and want it now. The reason for this type of behavior is probably also a result of the success-driven and over-protective parents which grew the Millennials, often called ‘helicopter’ parents [44]. For an illustration, when little GenXers (born 1965-1980) were students the biggest challenge for teachers was classroom discipline,

and with Millennials it was 'parent management' or keeping parents away from interfering the classroom, curriculum and grading system. Millennials in large number still live together with their parents, mostly because of the financial dependence. So the parents' influence is still present in their work and general life related decisions and as well the feeling that their parents are always here to support and protect them if they failure, which prolongs their adolescence and sense for self-responsibility.

In terms of attracting Millennials to the workplace or job advertising, it must be highlighted that Millennials are more compelled by the larger employment context than they are by the specifics of the job itself. As a result, employer branding is critical for organizations intent on successfully attracting and hiring these young people [45]. As employees, Millennials desire to psychologically and emotionally identify with the brand identity of their employer organization, which should be an extension and expression of their personhood. But at the end, the most important expectation from work for Millennials is always the high salary as an extrinsic work value [46][47].

One area that directly impacts human resource management is Millennials' view of loyalty to a company/employer [48][49]. They believe companies do not care about them as individuals, so it is not surprising why they put their personal goals above the companies' they work for. Millennials do feel some degree of loyalty, but it's toward individuals they work with, not the faceless organizations that pay their salaries [50]. It is very probably that many of them will drop out of corporate life and start the entrepreneurial route, as a large number of Millennials (35%) that already have job have also started their own business on the side [51]. For many of them, it's the only way they can pay the bills.

Millennials grew up in a period in which they had more daily interaction with other ethnicities and cultures than any other generation before. Unlike the Boomers who grew up in fairly homogeneous settings, the new crop of young adults had much greater exposure to multiculturalism, a diversity of races, religions, and backgrounds. So they can be considered as the most tolerant generation to diversity. It is believed that they are technologically knowledgeable, socially responsible and work well collaboratively [52].

C. Macedonian Young Generation: National Context

Republic of Macedonia is young country, located in Southeast Europe, on the Balkan Peninsula. It exists as independent state since September 1991, after the breakup of the Federal State of Yugoslavia. Skopje is the capitol and the main political, cultural, economic and academic centre of the country. In Republic of Macedonia live 2 065 769 citizens, and 457 477 of them are young people at age 15 to 29 [53].

The Macedonian young people have been witnesses of several dramatic and remarkable events in their recent past [54]: collapse of the federative state and separation into smaller independent countries; shift from

communism to capitalism; civil wars in the close neighborhood (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Kosovo); Belgrade city (Serbia's capitol) bombing by NATO; armed ethnical conflicts in the country in 2001; Ohrid framework agreement (which was signed as response to the ethnical conflict with aim to guarantee to all ethnic communities in Macedonia the political, societal and cultural participation and self-expression within the Macedonian state); long transition process; privatization of the state ownership; visa limitation and liberation; change of the domestic and foreign currencies (dinar into denar; douche mark into euro); high unemployment and poverty against instant enrichment; many political and governmental changes; assassination attempt/tragic death of the country's presidents (Kiro Gligorov, Boris Trajkovski), tragic death of the most popular Macedonian young singer and humanitarian Toshe Proeski, diplomatic conflicts with Greece (trade boycott/embargo in 1994/95 and country's name/identity issue), several political and corporate affairs and world economic crisis in 2008. The youth unemployment rate of the Republic of Macedonia is one of the highest worldwide according to ETF [55] and ILO [56], standing at 53.7% in 2010, and it is nearly twice the unemployment rate of adults.

Another threat is the brain drain phenomena with high rates of young people who already left or plan to leave the country in search for better education/employment/life. According to the Global Competitiveness Report [57] Macedonian country is ranked at 123rd place for its capacity to retain talent (with value of only 2.6 from maximum 6).

II. METHODOLOGY

The empirical data used for this paper is part of a larger research study about the Macedonian youth [58]. The activities related to all phases of the development of the research study took place in: September, October and November 2013.

The research methodology approach/ research instrument was created according the well-known Shell Youth Studies, which are conducted regularly every three to four years in Germany since 1953. For that purpose, consultation/experts meetings were held with the author of the 15th Shell Youth Study, prof. Klaus Hurrellman.

As the most suitable for the specific needs of the research, a quota sample was designed, according to the representation of the young people in eight statistical regions in Republic of Macedonia. The total number of young people belonging to the Millennial generation (aged 15 to 29 years) in the country is 465.021 or 23% of the total population. Therefore, the total number of respondents, randomly selected, was expected to be N=1065 (level of confidence=95%, confidence interval=3). The field research had a successful turnout rate of 96.34% filled questionnaires. The total number of respondents who participated in the survey was N=1026. The general demographic characteristics of the targeted population are reflected in the sample.

For having a whole and clear picture about the main attitudes, beliefs and values shared by the Macedonian

young people, a combined approach of quantitative and qualitative techniques and procedures is used. A survey/questionnaire research (face to face) is conducted on a representative sample of youth population and semi-structured interviews are made with typical and atypical representatives of the youth population.

Both descriptive and explanatory research methods are used for this paper, the quantitative data are analyzed on univariate level (general distribution rate, mean values) and bivariate level (cross tabulation, Chi square, Independent sample T test), at significance levels $p < 0.05$ and $p < 0.01$, which means that generalized conclusions can be extracted from the results as they apply to the 95% or 99% of the targeted population.

III. RESULTS

It is expected that Macedonian young people although belonging to the Millennial generation according the birth age, still have specific characteristics that are influenced by the national historical and socio-political context and are maybe more alike their peers in the Former Yugoslavian countries (Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, Bosnia, Slovenia) and other (post-communist) countries in the region with similar recent history and at the same development stage. Also the individual socio-demographic characteristics of the youth are considered to be an issue of a great importance for valid data generalization.

Therefore, this paper investigates the following research hypothesis:

H₁= There are major differences in the general characteristics, work related values and preferences between the Macedonian young people and the members of the Millennial Generation worldwide, based upon the national socio-political and historical context.

H₂: There are significant differences in the general characteristics, work related values and preferences between the Macedonian young people based upon their individual socio-demographic characteristics.

Young people were offered several alternatives for which they should indicate whether they consider them fashionable or old-fashioned personally for them, regardless of the popularity that certain values possess among the young generation in general. "Having a career" is considered as the most fashionable preference (79.9%), together with "being independent" (78.9%) for the Macedonian Millennials, while "being loyal (toward partner, employer)" is the item which got the lowest rate, or more precisely 24.4% of the respondents consider this characteristic as not that fashioned or out of fashion (11.1%). This confirms the issue that members of the Millennial generation in general and in Macedonia as well, have with the loyalty as they've learned that in many situations this kind of virtue doesn't pay off. There are certain statistically significant differences according the gender, age and ethnicity, so the female respondents consider loyalty as more fashionable than the male ($p < 0.05$), responsibility is less fashionable for the

age group 15-19 ($p < 0.05$), independence is considered as most fashionable for the age group 20-24 ($p < 0.05$), Macedonian young people have shown higher popularity of the responsibility, independence and having a career than the Albanian representatives ($p < 0.05$).

We asked the Macedonian young people, which work values are most valued for them. They had the opportunity to rank the first three (of nine) most significant values. The "personal dignity" is ranked as the first most important value, the second ranked value is "honesty" and the third ranked value is "tolerance".

It is particularly important to investigate the attitude of the youth population about the desired sector for their employment. We asked the young people in which sector they prefer to be employed (no matter of the current employment situation), so as it was expected and confirmed with the results from the interview, the most of the respondents pointed out the public administration (38.6%) as the first employment choice and after that the private business sector (33.6%) was chosen. The interest for employment in international organizations (13.2%) and NGO sector (4%) has shown low rates, for employment in some other type of organization declared 4.2% and 6.5% didn't have an answer.

"Working abroad is something, but nothing can beat working in a state institution. There is no big salary, but you are laidback all day or you can do something else... Therefore, it is important to know what you want. I want to buy a good car, holiday cottage, to secure myself within a position in an institution, then, my wife, and if I had a child, I would also find him/her a job in an institution. The problem is just how to accomplish all that. But, we have elections coming, and this period I will be the most active member." (Atanas, 28, Delcevo)

"I want to work in a public institution. I would gladly perform all my tasks." (Marija, 18, Kumanovo region)

This kind of attitude can be due to the job uncertainty in the private/business sector and/or not having the financial capacity for starting up an own business, which is of course even more expressed in a time of economic crisis, although for having no dilemma about the right reasons for this preference it is highly desirable as a future step the motivation of the youth for work in the public sector (Public Service Motivation Theory) as an intrinsic motivational factor for the Macedonian Millennials to be measured.

In order to find some implications about the working preferences of the Macedonian Millennials, cross tabulations by gender and place of living were made, by testing the Pearson Chi square. The results have shown that there is difference according the place of living ($p < 0.01$), or more precisely young people living in the city in a same extent (36.1%) would prefer to work in public or private sector, while the young people from the village in a larger extent would prefer for their employment rather the public administration (42.2%) than the private/business sector (29.8%). A deeper analysis indicates that actually the female population of the Macedonian Millennial generation living in the village has the highest desire (51.1%) to work in the public administration ($p < 0.05$).

In order to measure the fear of unemployment we asked the respondents about their perception of (difficulty) finding employment with the current education level they have (or after finishing the faculty), and the results show that major part or more exactly 65% believe that they will hardly find a job, 15% think that they will need a further education, and only 13% believe that will find work almost immediately. The statistical analysis ($p < 0.05$) shows that Albanian young people in a larger extent (26.4%) believe that will find a job immediately than the Macedonian young people (8%).

The young participants in the study were offered to rate sixteen problems in the Macedonian society, evaluating them on a scale from 1 to 4 (1-not concerning at all, 4 – very concerning), and according the mean values of the responses, the top five most worrying problems for Macedonian Millennials are: unemployment ($M=3.8$); poverty ($M=3.76$); increased number of cancer patients ($M=3.42$); job uncertainty ($M=3.32$) and environmental pollution ($M=3.26$). Statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$) were registered by the Independent Sample T test according several independent variables. Therefore, boys ($M=3.32$) are more concerned about environmental pollution than girls ($M=3.21$); the more concerned are the young people living in urban areas than those living in the rural areas for all the identified problems; the more concerned are the Macedonian young people for all the identified problems than the Albanian young people; poverty and unemployment are the most worrying problems for the young people living in the North-eastern and South-western regions, and the least concern for the young people from Pollog region.

From these findings we can conclude that the fear of unemployment between the Macedonian youth is very high, which is also confirmed with the qualitative data analysis:

“Today’s youth is called “the lost youth” or “the lost generation”. And this is because of high level of poverty that reigns in our country, and over 50% of young people are unemployed.” (Sarita, 24, Suto Orizari)

“The unemployment is high: it is difficult for young people to get a decent employment. Everything is politicized, corrupt.” (Zulem, 28, Strumica)

“I think unemployment is a major problem in Macedonia, which leads to financial and health problems.” (Martina, 18, Skopje)

“I have remarks when it comes to employment through the administration, I think there are too many employments through political parties and friendly connections, and because of this they never employ suitable and qualified persons for the job.” (Violeta, 29, Kumanovo)

“Unemployment is very high and I think that will be one of the major reasons why one day I will leave the country.” (Erмира, 24, Tetovo)

Respondents were asked to rank the most significant factors required to find and accept a job. In the table below we can see that having “friends and connections” is the factor which is ranked as first for finding a job,

having “political connections” is the second most important factor, the “level of education” is the third factor, while having “professional skills” is ranked as fourth factor in terms of importance for finding a job and having “luck” is at the last place. There are certain differences ($p < 0.05$) in the ranking by ethnicity (see Table IV).

The most important factor for accepting a job is the “salary”, the second by significance is “safe workplace”, third is “job satisfaction” and the fourth and the last is “working with people I like”. The analysis didn’t show any statistically significant differences according the demographic characteristics.

In order to measure the entrepreneurial attitude of Macedonian Millennials and their readiness for starting up an own business we asked the respondents to answer on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 – not ready at all; 5 – strongly deterrent) how ready they feel to start their own business (if they have a possibility to get a strong financial support). The data analysis shows that 35.6% of the young people don’t feel ready at all, slightly ready are 17.7%, somewhat ready are 18.9%, feeling ready are 15.9% and strongly deterrent to start up own business are only 8.6%.

As a most important motivational factor for pursuing an own business they pointed out the “increase of the personal income” (49.6%), and on the second place the “greater independence” (24.2%). These findings are complementary with the results described earlier in the text where we can see that the independence is considered as very important for the Macedonian Millennials and the salary is the most important factor for accepting a job.

One third of the respondents who are feeling (either strongly or somewhat) ready to start up their business ($N=739$) answered that the main reason why they would do that will be “to have a freedom to make decisions and to control the business” (34%) and in 18.9% cases it would be because “there are no better options for work”.

Statistically significant ($p < 0.01$) differences by several demographic characteristics are registered, therefore it can be concluded that the profile of the Macedonian Millennial entrepreneur could be the following: a young man; aged 25-29; with completed higher education; originating from a family that owns/owned business, living in an urban area.

The role and the influence of the parents in the life of the Macedonian Millennials is also a topic of interest, so the young people were asked with whom they live and how they make decisions about important issues. Macedonian young people who are over 18 (79.7%) still live with their parents, mostly because of practical reasons (35.2%). More than half of the respondents (51.8%) said that they have the freedom to make their own decisions, the other 40% said that they carry decisions on important issues together with their parents, while the father (35.1%) is pointed out as someone who has the greatest influence on their decisions (mother – 24.3%, no one but my self – 28.1%). These findings confirm the strong relationship and mutual dependence between the Macedonian Millennials and their parents.

The qualitative data analysis comes to the same conclusions:

“When making the important decisions of my life, I do this together with my parents who always support me and stand by my side. For example, when choosing to enroll in secondary medical school, the decision was mine, and my parents supported me.” (Martina, 18, Skopje)

“I discuss with my parents everything, except the things for which I know they consider as not acceptable, because they will forbid them” (Bojan, 22, Shtip)

These research findings confirm the primary null research hypothesis:

H_0 = There are no major differences in the general characteristics, work related values and preferences between the Macedonian young people and the members of the Millennial Generation worldwide, based upon the national socio-political and historical context.

The deeper analysis rejects the secondary null research hypothesis:

H_0 = There are no significant differences in the general characteristics, work related values and preferences between the Macedonian young people based upon the individual socio-demographic characteristics.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

From the findings it can be concluded that the national socio-political and historical context is not a factor which differentiates Macedonian young people (as a group) from their peers worldwide, or more precisely, they definitely belong to the Millennial Generation, by sharing common general characteristics, work related values and preferences. But in the same time, there are significant differences at individual level, where the individual socio-demographic characteristic (age, gender, living place, education, region, and ethnicity) play a great role.

Several important conclusions and recommendations, as implications for human resource management practitioners, could be highlighted. For Macedonian Millennials having a career and independence it is considered as very important, which means that they will prefer to work/stay in an organization which features high opportunities for career development and high levels of work autonomy (in deciding process, scheduling and prioritizing the work tasks, work methods, negotiating with stakeholders, choosing the partners, delegating duties to subordinates, etc). They are pessimistic about the employment opportunities available after finishing the studies and their highest fear is the threat of being unemployed, which probably make them more realistic about the possibilities they have available and less picky. They believe that to get an employment contract/a job they must have political or family connections (having close friends/family members on important positions), regardless of the level of education or professional skills they possess. This could be very harmful for their moral and motivation for further education and professional development. The salary is very important factor for accepting a job for the Macedonian Millennials, so the

organizations must offer attractive or at least decent beginning salary (average salary in the industry/occupation to be the minimal offered). Personal dignity is the most valued value for these young people. That gives us knowledge that they will probably leave the job/organization if someone makes an attack on their personal dignity. Being honest and tolerant are very important intrinsic drives for these young people, so it is expected that they will prefer doing honest business, being socially responsible and making ethical decisions, also they will have tolerance for diversity in the workplace, they will be able to cooperate with coworkers/clients from different generations and different national and ethnical origins. The secure job is very important for Macedonian Millennials, and that is one of the reasons why they prefer working in a public sector/administration, rather than the private/business sector. For understanding the other reasons for this preference the motivation of the youth for work in the public sector should be measured, as an implication for future research activity. Macedonian Millennials are not feeling ready to start up an own business or they only think about that possibility without having a proactive approach. If they however decide to start business on their own, it would be to increase their personal income; to have a greater independence; and freedom to make decisions and control the business. The profile of the Macedonian Millennial entrepreneur could be the following: a young man; aged 25-29; with completed higher education; originating from a family that now owns or owned business in the recent past, living in an urban area. Macedonian young people have very strong relationship with their parents who have very big influence (father more than mother) over their both life and work - related decisions. This means that for certain work related issues they will discuss with their parents and ask them for an opinion, guidance and/or approval. It is supposed that once they reach an (financial) independence (and it is shown to be a value of great importance for them) the influence of the parents will decrease, but not disappear completely mostly because of the patriarchal tradition and society.

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